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Legitimation and Solidarity Strategies in Saad Jaber's COVID-19 Press Conference Briefings: A Critical Discourse Analysis

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the press conference briefings delivered by Jordan's former Minister of Health, Saad Jaber, during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. Unlike much existing scholarship that frames pandemic communication primarily through the lens of crisis or fear discourse, this article situates Jaber's briefings within a hybrid continuum between urgency and solidarity. The aim is to explore how his discourse fostered credibility, encouraged compliance with defense laws, and reinforced collective identity during a period of acute medical and social uncertainty. The study draws on a corpus of thirty-two briefings delivered between March and October 2020. Jaber's oral statements were transcribed and analyzed using van Leeuwen's socio-semiotic model of legitimation and Wodak's model of national identity construction. The qualitative analysis considered both linguistic strategies and semiotic resources, including voice quality, tone, and audience reception on social media. Findings reveal that Jaber legitimized government measures through appeals to expertise, rationalization, and moral evaluation, while simultaneously humanizing his role through empathy and involvement. His calm, steady prosody and measured delivery afforded reassurance, softening the authority of his institutional position. These features enabled a relational mode of governance that this article conceptualizes as *sentient authority* – a mitigated form of power exercised through affective alignment, calibrated social distance, and solidarity appeals. The study concludes that Jaber's discourse represents a counter-crisis communication model,

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balancing directive authority with inclusive solidarity, and underscores the value of CDA in unpacking how language and semiotic resources shape public trust in times of crisis.

Keywords: Saad Jaber; Critical Discourse Analysis; Legitimation; Solidarity; Press Conference Briefings; COVID-19 Pandemic; Sentient Authority

1. Introduction

1.1. Aim of the Study

Much of the scholarship on pandemic communication has framed it either as a *discourse of fear* (e.g. Altheidi) ^[1] or as a *discourse of crisis* (e.g. Cap) ^[2], perspectives that emphasize threat and urgency. Other studies, following Positive Discourse Analysis by Martin ^[3,4], highlight how language can be mobilized for constructive and solidarity-oriented purposes. This study positions itself in the space between these two poles, examining how pandemic communication may simultaneously invoke urgency while seeking to calm, unify, and mobilize publics.

The case study focuses on the press conference briefings delivered by Jordan's former Minister of Health, Saad Jaber (henceforth Jaber), during the 2020 COVID-19 crisis. In contrast to work that has shown how crisis discourse reinforces polarization or racialized divisions (e.g., Whitham) ^[5], the present analysis demonstrates how Jaber's rhetoric sought to minimize internal dichotomies and foreground a collective Jordanian identity. To do so, the study investigates the interplay of *legitimation* and *solidarity* strategies as central resources in his communication with the public. The briefings are thus approached as a distinctive form of *counter-crisis discourse* that helped shape national responses during a period of acute medical emergency.

The analysis also incorporates a semiotic dimension, recognizing that meaning in social semiotics is conveyed not only through language but through other communicative modes. As de Fina ^[6] notes, identity projection is enacted through concrete linguistic and semiotic choices in interaction. Jaber's persona became integral to how his messages were received. In a feature story on Jaber in *Middle East Eye*, Ersan ^[7] states, "for many viewers, the messenger has become just as important as the message." The study, therefore, attends not only to the content of Jaber's discourse but also to its performative and semiotic form, including the channel and setting through which it was delivered.

1.2. Why Study Press Briefings?

A press conference briefing, also called a 'news conference' or 'press briefing,' is "a meeting at which a person or organization makes a public statement and reporters can ask questions" ^[8]. A press release, by contrast, is a written statement that may summarize the press briefing or is issued to the media independently of briefings. In the current study, press briefings rather than press releases are investigated.

Press conferences are a fundamental tool in public communication. Goradze & Gvarishvili ^[9] describe them as "strategic communicative tools" that "are valued for their procedural and general characteristics [...] due to their interactive, dynamic, and collaborative nature". As a form of official public address, Jaber's briefings were instrumental in shaping and reshaping public discourse on the pandemic and collective identities in Jordanian society. They performed a dialectical role by acting and interacting in society, including creating visions in light of the interests of the wider national community ^[10]. In van Dijk's ^[11] terms, they became "sites of production and sites of reception".

Furthermore, the pandemic created a state of medical uncertainty and emotional upheaval. The press conferences were a move by the prime minister to, first, address this uncertainty with proper information and, second, to contain the emotional turmoil of the public. Aligning with Fauconnier and Turner's ^[12] concept of "achieving human scale," Jaber attempted to simplify the complexities of the situation linguistically and conceptually to instigate behavioral change. The most effective means of maintaining "distributional power" ^[13] was through press conferences aired on mainstream channels.

In light of this, the study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What discursive strategies of legitimation and solidarity did Minister of Health Saad Jaber employ in his press conference briefings to address Jordanians during the COVID-19 pandemic?

2. How did semiotic factors (e.g., delivery, visual cues, and medium) substantiate Jaber's appeal to the Jordanian public?
3. How did Jaber's discourse recalibrate the boundaries between institutional authority and popular participation during the pandemic?

1.3. Why Study the Discourse of Saad Jaber?

Saad Jaber is a veteran cardiologist who served in the Jordanian army for over thirty years. With the rank of Major General, he was appointed the Director-General of Jordan Royal Medical Services on November 22, 2018. He served as the Minister of Health between May 9, 2019 and Octo-

ber 12, 2020. Jaber's name became iconic for Jordanians during the COVID-19 crisis, and his influence was notable not only because of his credentials but also because of his motivational approach and ability to position himself in the middle ground between authority and solidarity with the public. His engaging updates and directives during the rigorous lockdown captured the nation's attention and garnered widespread admiration and support. In his article, Ersan ^[7] described him as "the charismatic 60-something heart surgeon [who] has become somewhat of a sensation in the country, as he has been dubbed the Jordanian George Clooney." The picture of Jaber and Adaileh in **Figure 1** below was posted alongside the article to show the resemblance of Jaber to Clooney.



Figure 1. Saad Jaber (left) next to Amjad Adaileh (right) from an article in *Middle East Eye* on April 29, 2020 ^[7].

For these reasons, Jaber represents more than a political or medical authority. He became a mobilizing persona whose discourse both informed and reassured. His case, therefore, offers a particularly rich site for critical discourse analysis, illustrating how institutional legitimacy and collective solidarity can be negotiated discursively during a national crisis.

1.4. Description of the Setting

The COVID-19 pandemic was declared a global health emergency by the World Health Organization (WHO) on March 11, 2020. In Jordan, the government had already taken strict measures as early as January 26, 2020, when the outbreak was still in its infancy ^[14]. The National Epidemics Committee, affiliated with the Ministry of Health, was mandated to oversee all necessary actions to contain the disease. These preemptive measures delayed the

appearance of Jordan's first confirmed case until March 2, 2020, a moment described by Ward (2020) ^[15] as a success story.

On March 17, the government activated defense laws, followed by a nationwide lockdown on March 21. These measures significantly curtailed mobility and daily life and were not universally welcomed by the public. Reports from the Public Security Directorate noted, for example, that on March 26, 385 individuals were arrested for violating curfew restrictions ^[16]. Moreover, skepticism about the severity of the disease persisted, with some citizens dismissing it as exaggerated or even a hoax. In this climate, the government recognized that securing compliance required not only enforcement of law but also public persuasion, which necessitated systematic communication strategies.

From March 2, to October 2020, the National Center for Security and Crisis Management (NCSCM) estab-

lished a routine of holding daily evening press conferences, broadcast live on Jordan's mainstream television networks – *Jordan TV*, *Almamlaka TV*, and the popular private channel *Ro'ya*. The briefings typically began with Minister of State for Media Affairs Amjad Adaileh, who reported on defense laws, curfew hours, and mobility arrangements. He was followed by Minister of Health Saad Jaber, who provided updates on infection and recovery figures, described the progression of the pandemic, and delivered medical advice and directives. Occasionally, officials from the Coronavirus Crisis Cell and the NCSCM took part. Transcripts and summaries of the conferences were disseminated on the Ministry of Health's Coronavirus-specific website [<https://corona.moh.gov.jo/en>] and across official social media platforms, including those of the Prime Minister's Office. For many Jordanians, these nightly broadcasts became a communal ritual, as families gathered to receive reliable, day-to-day updates on the country's pandemic progression.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Critical Linguistic Studies on COVID-19

Studies on the COVID-19 pandemic have given rise to what Whitham ^[5] describes as the “cultural politics of [the] COVID-19 crisis.” Research has proliferated across a wide range of fields, from medicine to humor studies to food culture. Within this diverse body of work, a growing strand of studies has examined language practices.

In the Jordanian context, several studies have focused on these linguistic practices. Al Soud et al. ^[17] analyzed how the pandemic introduced new neologisms into Jordanian Arabic. Ali and Abu Faraj ^[18] explored how humor on *Facebook* framed representations of the pandemic. Abdulhadi and Al-Abbas ^[19] applied van Dijk's ^[20] socio-cognitive approach to news reports of Jordan's first COVID-19 case, showing how regional media often employed terminology with negative connotations that heightened anxiety, while local outlets emphasized government action and reassurance. Similarly, Alkhawaldeh ^[21] investigated the pragmatic techniques used by Jordanian officials in televised interviews, highlighting the performative use of religious allusions, metaphoric language, and iterative phrasing to shape public sentiment and encourage compliance.

In a related vein, Almahasees et al. ^[22] examined King Abdullah II's three speeches during the pandemic, using Martin's ^[3] Positive Discourse Analysis (PDA) and Wodak's ^[23] model to identify discursive strategies such as nomination, predication, and intensification that conveyed unity and reassurance.

Comparable CDA studies have addressed leaders' pandemic discourse internationally, such as studies of Donald Trump in the U.S. ^[24], Imran Khan in Pakistan ^[25,26], and Nana Akufo-Addo in Ghana ^[27]. These works consistently reveal the deployment of rhetorical resources such as metaphor, repetition, religious references that aimed at persuasion, reassurance, and authority-building. Other strands of research have examined public and media discourse, such as Semino's ^[28] work on COVID metaphors in the UK and Basu's ^[29] study of Indian media representations, showing how pandemic narratives construct threat, solidarity, and identity.

Despite the limited studies on press briefings in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, two studies emerge as relevant to the current study. The first study by Goradze & Gvarishvili ^[9] conducted a pragmatic analysis of the impact of generic markers used in the monologic and Q/A segments of news conferences on audiences in the USA and their strategic communicative function. They found that speakers tend to employ a more positive affective tone in speeches that are pre-planned. Bunnag & Chaemsaitong ^[30] also conducted a multimodal analysis of the interplay between verbal and visual resources used in press briefings. They investigated how briefings served the political interests of the government in restoring the public's trust during the pandemic to cover for the government's surveillance failure.

Despite this growing body of literature, critical studies of pandemic discourse in Jordan remain largely confined to leaders' speeches and media reporting. Very little attention has been paid to the daily press conference briefings that served as the primary interface between the government and citizens. The present study attempts to fill in this gap by focusing on Saad Jaber's briefings, addressing how his discourse combined strategies of legitimation and solidarity to foster compliance with defense laws while mitigating their harshness.

2.2. Studies in Critical Discourse Studies (CDS)

Critical Discourse Studies (CDS) offers multiple complementary approaches for analyzing public communication during crises. Prominent strands include the socio-cognitive approach (van Dijk) ^[11,31], the discourse-historical approach (Wodak) ^[23], the dialectical-relational approach (Fairclough) ^[32], and the socio-semiotic tradition (van Leeuwen) ^[33], among other interdisciplinary approaches. While these frameworks differ in their emphases and analytical methodology, they share a commitment to situating discourse within its broader socio-political, cultural, and historical contexts, and to exposing how language and other semiotic resources reproduce or challenge power relations.

Van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach (SCA) ^[20,34] emphasizes the role of social cognition in both the production and interpretation of discourse, as well as the importance of contextualization in understanding human conduct. In Jaber's briefings, this was evident in the way he appealed to collective understandings of responsibility and perception of the threat during the crisis. Rather than positioning the public as adversaries, Jaber's discourse framed the threat as the virus itself and, at times, irresponsible behavior that could endanger the community. In this way, his language reinforced solidarity by aligning public cognition with governmental action.

Wodak's Discourse-Historical Approach ^[35–37] emphasizes interdiscursivity and contextual embedding, tracing how present discourses relate to past ones and institutional practices. This perspective is especially useful for situating Jaber's briefings within wider discursive traditions of crisis communication, where institutional authority and personal persuasion intersect.

Fairclough's dialectical-relational approach ^[38–40] conceives discourse as semiosis that shapes and is shaped by social structures. Although language remains central, Fairclough explicitly uses semiosis to include non-linguistic modes (e.g., visual images and non-verbal communication), allowing relevant multimodal cues to be incorporated where appropriate. This makes it well-suited for examining how Jaber's discourse not only conveyed information but also enacted authority and solidarity through multimodal cues such as voice quality, tone, and demeanor.

Van Leeuwen's ^[33,41–42] socio-semiotic approach con-

ceptualizes meaning-making as embedded in broader social practices, with a particular focus on how discourses legitimize actions and institutions. Of central importance to this study is his model of legitimation ^[41–42], which outlines four strategies – authorization, moral evaluation, rationalization, and mythopoesis – for analyzing how speakers justify policies and social practices. This model provides a systematic framework for examining how Jaber legitimized restrictive defense laws and health directives during the pandemic, while simultaneously framing them as socially necessary and morally grounded.

Van Leeuwen's ^[33] concept of *affordance*, originally introduced by Gibson ^[43], also highlights how semiotic resources, such as attire and delivery style, make certain meanings, such as authority, reassurance, and intimacy, available within the context of crisis communication.

Taken together, these CDS traditions enable a multi-layered analysis of Jaber's briefings. Van Dijk ^[31] explains how collective meanings and shared responsibilities were cognitively constructed; Wodak situates the discourse within its interdiscursive and institutional context; Fairclough ^[32] underscores its multimodal enactment of authority and identity; and van Leeuwen offers the systematic model through which strategies of legitimation, and their intersection with solidarity, are realized.

2.3. Theoretical Perspectives on Threat and Solidarity

This section outlines three complementary approaches: fear discourse, proximization theory, and Positive Discourse Analysis (PDA). Together, they illuminate how crisis communication can combine threat framing with reassurance to shape public response.

Discourses of conflict and crisis often address themes such as power asymmetries and the construction of identity, and have long held a dominant place in media communication, as noted by scholars such as Fowler and Kress ^[44] and Bell ^[45]. While these perspectives remain central in Critical Linguistics, more recent work has introduced paradigms that address conflict and crisis as distinct phenomena.

Altheide ^[1] and Altheide & Michalowski ^[46] developed the concept of *fear discourse*, arguing that modern mass media and political communication circulate fear as a per-

vasive element of everyday life. Within this discourse, metaphor serves as a key linguistic resource. Charteris-Black^[47] shows how leaders use metaphors of war or family to dramatize crises, cast themselves as protectors, and elicit compliance. During the COVID-19 pandemic, martial metaphors such as “fighting the virus” in “a battle” or describing medical workers as “frontline heroes” became common rhetorical strategies, as demonstrated in Whitham’s^[7] study of the UK and Almahasees et al.’s^[22] analysis of King Abdullah II’s speeches in Jordan.

Extending this perspective, Chilton^[48] and Cap^[2] explain how discourses of crisis rely on *proximization* strategies to depict distant threats as immediate and personally relevant. Through spatial, temporal, and axiological framing, dangers are presented as moving toward the “us” group (Inside-Deictic Center) from an external “them” (Outside-Deictic Center). This mechanism not only heightens urgency but also legitimizes emergency measures. In the context of COVID-19, proximization explains how martial metaphors and other crisis framings were operationalized to make the pandemic appear imminent and pressing.

While fear discourse and proximization emphasize threat, Martin’s^[3–4] Positive Discourse Analysis (PDA) highlights the constructive potential of language to build solidarity, reassurance, and hope. PDA examines how discourse can mobilize power productively rather than coercively, fostering cooperation and resilience. As Almahasees et al.^[22] show, King Abdullah II’s speeches combined appeals to unity and religious reassurance with recognition of the threat, exemplifying a balance between fear and positive mobilization.

The present study situates Jaber’s discourse within this continuum. His briefings occasionally reflected elements of fear discourse and proximization, particularly when emphasizing the gravity of the situation, but they leaned less heavily on martial metaphors than many international counterparts. Instead, Jaber’s rhetorical style drew more on PDA-like strategies, prioritizing solidarity and reassurance while still acknowledging risk. This hybrid positioning reflects both the institutional necessity of conveying urgency and the cultural imperative of maintaining cohesion within Jordan’s collectivist social fabric. The present study suggests that these strategies, when enacted in Jaber’s

briefings, did not manifest as coercive fear or pure reassurance alone, but as a hybrid form of governance that we term ‘*sentient authority*’. The term will be further illustrated in the sections below.

3. Materials and Methods

The corpus comprises thirty-two press conference briefings delivered between March 2, and October 6, 2020, during which Jordanian officials Amjad Adaileh and Saad Jaber updated the public on the progression of the COVID-19 pandemic. Although both authors attended some briefings in person, only publicly available video recordings retrieved from *YouTube*, *Facebook*, and other online sources were used for analysis. All briefings were originally delivered in Arabic, with no official transcripts or subtitles provided by broadcasting channels. Government websites posted press releases covering defense laws announced by Adaileh and statistical summaries of Jaber’s updates. However, no complete scripts of Jaber’s oral briefings existed. For the purposes of this study, Jaber’s briefings were transcribed verbatim from the recordings. Documentary and statistical press releases were excluded, as the study focuses on the discursive and semiotic construction of meaning in the oral briefings. Jaber’s scripts will be given in their translated version in English.

The analysis employs Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) through van Leeuwen’s^[41–42] socio-semiotic framework, with a particular focus on legitimation strategies relevant to crisis-related public communication. Alongside this, solidarity-oriented strategies, especially those combining authority with appeals to unity, were identified as part of the thematic structure of the briefings. A combined micro- and macro-level textual analysis was applied using Wodak’s^[23,35] Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) to trace how these strategies operated within the communicative structure of Jaber’s discourse. In parallel, a visual-semiotic analysis addressed paralinguistic resources, such as voice quality, delivery, and public reception via social media, that contributed to the persuasive and solidarity-building force of the briefings. Rather than proceeding strictly bottom-up, the analysis was organized thematically to capture the multidimensional role of the briefings within the broader landscape of crisis communication in Jordan.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1. Interdiscursivity

Since this study draws on Wodak's DHA model, interdiscursivity and contextual interdependence emerge as important considerations in analyzing the briefings. It would be misleading to study the press conferences in isolation from their surrounding discourses. First, the briefings reflected the voice of the central government and thus embodied its institutional authority. Second, they drew on the World Health Organization's '*WHO Outbreak Communication Guidelines*'^[49], which identified five essential practices in epidemic communication: trust building, early announcement, transparency, understanding the public, and planning. While these principles represent responsibilities of the state, in the briefings, they were enacted through the communicative performance of Jaber. As WHO emphasized on January 15, 2020, communication failures during outbreaks undermine trust and compliance and prolong social and political turmoil; hence, "communication expertise has become as essential to outbreak control as epidemiological training and laboratory analysis"^[50].

The briefings also reveal interdiscursivity at the national level. They consisted of two complementary parts: Adaileh's segment, which focused on legal updates and defense measures, and Jaber's, which combined epidemiological authority with a communicative style marked by reassurance and solidarity. Adaileh's formal, authoritative exposition fulfilled institutional expectations of official briefings, aligning with the rule-based nature of communicative acts highlighted in social semiotics (van Leeuwen)^[33]. By contrast, Jaber's rhetoric departed from these generic conventions, weaving technical detail with a more personal, conversational style. This generic hybridity created a space for his individual voice, enabling greater intimacy with the public while still serving the overarching institutional purpose.

4.2. Strategies of Legitimation

In his briefings, Jaber consistently sought to substantiate two overarching values: credibility and trust-building, alongside the consolidation of collective solidarity. The first values align with strategies of legitimation. In light of van

Leeuwen's^[41] model of legitimation, Jaber employed multiple forms that enhanced his rhetorical effectiveness during the pandemic. These strategies not only justified the measures taken but also fostered credibility and public trust.

4.2.1. Authorization

This strategy addresses the capacity in which a person has authority. Van Leeuwen^[1] identifies six types of authority: personal (through institutional status), expert (through expertise), role model, impersonal (through laws, rules and regulations), by tradition (customs and norms), and by conformity (to traditions).

Jaber's authority stemmed from multiple sources, from his institutional role as Minister of Health, Cabinet member, and government spokesperson, as well as from his professional background as a medical expert and a military officer. He strategically invoked these identities to strengthen his credibility. He earned further status by positioning himself as a concerned citizen. In his March 25 briefing, he stated:

"I am a military person and a soldier before being a minister, and in the military, there are no pleas. But I beseech you, as a citizen who is jealous for his country before being anything else, please don't fail us."

Authority was also reinforced through the medium itself. The briefings were delivered from the National Centre for Security and Crisis Management (NCSCM) and broadcast on *Jordan TV*, the official state channel, visually anchoring his role within the apparatus of governmental authority.

Authority was further bolstered by transparency and consistency in information flow. From his first press conference on March 2, in which he proclaimed "as we promised you, with all transparency, this is the first case of coronavirus" to later updates, his briefings became a dependable source of pandemic information. Citing external validation further consolidated this authority. On July 12, he referenced international platforms that ranked Jordan first in containing the virus, thereby aligning national measures with global recognition.

Even in the face of public criticism, Jaber's calm, measured responses sustained his authoritative image. In

February 2020, after advising that the traditional *shmagh* – traditional Jordanian headgear – could be used for face protection, he was accused of giving misleading advice. On the *Ro'ya* TV show *Before Deletion* ^[51], he calmly apologized and clarified that the comment was based on prior consultation. Similarly, he faced backlash in March when he advised Jordanians to stay at home for two weeks so that the disease would “dry up and die”. Later on, he clarified the intended meaning and humorously revisited the phrase in June while calling for keeping ongoing precautions, without undermining his credibility. His handling of criticism served to reframe public criticism into a point of solidarity and reinforced his commitment to transparency.

In addition to institutional authority, Jaber engaged

in what van Leeuwen ^[41] terms authorization by model – legitimizing norms through personal example. He presented himself as a role model on social media, posting videos of himself adhering to hygiene protocols, social distancing, and the defense laws. In one video (**Figure 2**), he was seen wearing a mask and maintaining distance during a visit to his sister on Eid al-Adha, to which he received the comment that “he has kept his promise” ^[52]. In another (**Figure 3**), he and the Minister of Religious Affairs and Awqaf demonstrated the appropriate greeting protocols. By enacting the very behaviors he advocated, Jaber reinforced his credibility and demonstrated that these measures applied equally to leaders and citizens alike.



Figure 2. Jaber’s Adherence to Social Distancing and Mask-Wearing Protocols During Eid al-Adha Visit to his Sister ^[52].



Figure 3. Jaber and the Minister of Religious Affairs and Awqaf demonstrate the appropriate greeting protocol During the COVID-19 Pandemic ^[53].

4.2.2. Moral Evaluation

Moral evaluation is based on values. Van Leeuwen admits that it is not possible to find an explicit, linguistically motivated method for identifying moral evaluations. He states that we “can only recognize them on the basis of our commonsense cultural knowledge”.

Moral evaluation was central to Jaber’s appeals. He

consistently framed adherence to health measures as an ethical obligation. In his first briefing (March 2), he stated:

“The countries that managed to contain the pandemic were supported by responsible citizens. We, as Jordanians, have always proved that at times of difficulties we can act responsibly.”

At moments of heightened risk, he linked non-com-

pliance to culturally resonant moral codes, calling it “a rebellion” and “not manly” (March 26), thus framing these actions within the deeply embedded values of collective ethics and social responsibility. By repeatedly reminding citizens that skepticism and denial endangered “all of us,” Jaber positioned compliance not merely as obedience to law, but as a collective moral duty.

4.2.3. Rationalization

Rationalization refers to legitimizing practices by reference to their goals, uses, and effects. A key component of Jaber’s rationalization strategy involved publicly countering misinformation and addressing skepticism. On August 16, he acknowledged that “many people were skeptical about the disease [...] but this puts us all at risk”, underscoring the communal danger that arises from doubt. Seven months after his first press conference, on September 30, he reiterated that “many citizens still deny the existence of the pandemic and act accordingly.”

Rationalization was evident in Jaber’s frequent use of cause-and-effect reasoning to explain preventive measures: “The pandemic is not over and danger still exists. *So* we need to abide by the protocol” (May 27) and “We must wear the masks *to* protect our families” (October 4).

On May 17, he addressed false claims circulating on social media, stating they were “far from being scientific” before providing the accurate information. On September 3, he acknowledged that “there have been some discrepancies in some statements and media releases” but affirmed that “here we are before you, giving our statement with sincerity and transparency.” By identifying the doubt, explaining its consequences, and supplying corrective information, Jaber not only rationalized the need for action but also reinforced his credibility through measured, transparent communication.

He also sought to redirect emotion-driven behavior by appealing to logic and civic duty. Staying at home, maintaining social distancing, and withholding gatherings were framed as rational acts of social responsibility. Through stories of people who acted emotionally and suffered consequences, he reinforced reason and responsibility as the guiding principles in crisis management.

4.2.4. Mythopoesis

Legitimation at this level is achieved by storytelling. Stories may carry moral values or can be cautionary. They may signal legitimate or deviant social actions.

Jaber’s briefings drew on narratives to legitimize measures. On March 2, he praised a citizen who overcame fear and voluntarily came for PCR testing, saying that he was “proud” of him and presenting the act as exemplary civic responsibility. Conversely, on April 7, he recounted a case where a man named “Subhi” refused to admit his infected wife into hospital, framing it as “uncooperative” and using it as a cautionary tale about the dangers of non-cooperation. These stories personalized the stakes of compliance and grounded government measures in real-life consequences. Even his humorous return to the “dry up and die” phrase can be read as light mythopoesis, as he reappropriated a viral public meme^[18] to signal victory while maintaining public engagement.

Rather than operating as isolated tactics, these strategies worked together to enhance Jaber’s credibility and trustworthiness. Authority gave weight to his words and moral evaluation appealed to civic values. Rationalization grounded directives in logic, and mythopoesis humanized and reinforced key messages. This multi-layered approach helped him manage resistance, counter misinformation, and foster compliance with defense laws.

4.3. Discursive Realizations of Legitimation Strategies

While van Leeuwen’s^[41] socio-semiotic model identifies what kinds of legitimation occur, their persuasive effect in Jaber’s discourse derives from how they are realized linguistically. Four recurring discursive devices reinforce his legitimation strategies.

4.3.1. Providing Supporting Information

Jaber frequently bolstered his rationalization strategy with precise, verifiable detail. His briefings delivered daily updates on defense laws and statistical accounts of infections substantiated by meticulous numerical and procedural information. This explicitness served two functions. First, it conveyed transparency, reducing the perception of ma-

nipulation or withholding of information. Second, it positioned the briefings as the most reliable source of pandemic information, countering circulating misinformation. Even when addressing uncomfortable realities such as confirming the absence of an approved vaccine before global endorsement, Jaber avoided vague statements, maintaining a factual stance that sustained trust over time.

4.3.2. Story-telling

Narrative structuring was another recurrent device. In cases of public controversy, Jaber often recounted events chronologically and in detail, thereby reinforcing the authenticity of his account. The “Subhi” incident, a man refusing to admit his wife to hospital, became a widely discussed case on social media. Jaber’s detailed recount of the events on March 25 reframed the incident as a cautionary tale, fulfilling the mythopoetic function of legitimating government measures through moralized narratives. By embedding these stories within familiar Jordanian codes of conduct, he linked (non-)compliance with shared cultural values.

4.3.3. Minimal Use of Metaphor

Unlike other pandemic discourses in Jordan (e.g. Almahasees, ^[22]; and Alkhawaldeh ^[21]), the current study found that Jaber’s briefings used metaphor sparingly. This plain stylistic choice limited emotional framing and emphasized direct, factual delivery, reinforcing both rationalization through presenting measures as grounded in evidence, and authority by projecting the seriousness of the crisis. The primary metaphor he employed – framing COVID-19 as a “battle” – aligned with broader crisis discourse, by invoking social responsibility rather than dramatic emotions, echoing patterns identified in Whitham’s ^[5] study of the UK situation.

4.3.4. Use of the Active Voice

Jaber’s discourse consistently employed activation rather than passivation, directly naming agents and their actions (e.g., “The National Pandemic Team decided...”, “We did not announce...”, “He stayed in quarantine”). This syntactic pattern made responsibility explicit, avoiding the obscuring of agency often associated with passive construc-

tions (Fowler et al.) ^[44]. Chan & Maglio ^[54] state that the active voice increases immediacy and perceived responsibility. By linguistically foregrounding actors, Jaber underscored governmental accountability and transparency, further consolidating trust.

4.4. Discursive Realizations of Solidarity and Identity Strategies

In Critical Discourse Analysis, solidarity strategies are widely recognized as central to how language constructs social relations and collective identities. Van Dijk’s socio-cognitive model ^[34,55] demonstrates how inclusive and exclusive pronouns function as powerful tools of in-group and out-group polarization, reinforcing “us” versus “them” dynamics in political and media discourse. Similarly, van Leeuwen’s ^[41] framework on legitimation highlights how the construction of a “common enemy” or a “shared goal” often relies on strategies of authorization and moral evaluation, whereby collective fear or aspiration is mobilized to justify action. Fairclough ^[40] complements this view by stressing that solidarity is inseparable from identity formation. He argues that discourses are “inculcated in identities” and enacted through both primary agents (individual actors) and corporate agents (institutions or collectivities). Individuals, he notes, are rarely confined to fixed roles. Rather, their ability to transform social relations depends on reflexivity and on their capacity to become corporate agents capable of collective action and shaping social change. Achieving social identity, then, involves not only assuming institutional positions but also personifying them, that is, investing them with personal qualities and enacting them in distinctive ways.

Wodak’s Discourse-Historical Approach ^[23,35,37] extends these insights by systematizing discursive strategies initially developed for the construction of national identity, which are equally relevant to solidarity in crisis contexts. These strategies include nomination (identifying and naming who belongs to the collective and who is excluded), predication (assigning positive or negative attributes to these groups), argumentation (justifying solidarity through topoi such as responsibility, threat, or urgency), perspectivization (foregrounding some voices while backgrounding others), and intensification/mitigation (strengthening or softening evaluative claims). Together, these strategies

demonstrate that solidarity is not simply a natural or static condition but a discursive effect actively produced through language.

In the COVID-19 briefings, one of the key identities that Saad Jaber constructed was that of a minister inseparable from the Jordanian public. He achieved this assimilation of identity through the following strategies:

4.4.1. Nomination/Referential Strategies

Jaber's solidarity was often anchored in the use of the pronoun *we*. Two types are significant: inclusive and exclusive (Scheibman) ^[56]. The inclusive *we* positioned him alongside citizens as equal participants in the crisis: "Our future is in *our* hands"; "We are at an important juncture, so we *must* be committed." This inclusive voice foregrounded shared experience and responsibility, presenting speaker and audience as co-agents. Conversely, the exclusive *we* referred to government institutions and medical bodies. In Arabic, this often appeared through the nominalized *تم*/tam-ma/ [took place] + verbal noun structure (e.g., "تم الحجر", "تم التنسيق مع جميع الجهات الطبية", "الإجراءات التي تم اتخاذها"), [translated into the passive in English as "coordination with all medical parties took place", "the quarantine was enacted" and "the measures that were taken" respectively]. These forms, described as agentive passives (Ayyat et al.) ^[57], do not erase agency but convey collective, assimilated action, in line of what Fairclough ^[40] terms *corporate agency*. By emphasizing institutional collaboration rather than individual command, Jaber flattened hierarchical distance.

4.4.2. Predication Strategies

Jaber frequently praised health workers and crisis teams as "working hard," "worn out," and "not taking a single day off for weeks." Such characterizations humanized these groups while elevating them as moral exemplars, reinforcing their role within the national collective. This positive predication invited public empathy and framed compliance as recognition of the sacrifices of frontline workers. At the same time, he described those who did not abide by the measures as "uncooperative" or even "rebellious." By juxtaposing diligent, selfless health workers with defiant individuals, Jaber drew a sharp moral boundary. Solidarity was framed as patriotic, while resistance as socially irresponsible.

4.4.3. Argumentation

Jaber's appeals often drew upon the topoi of *responsibility* and *solidarity* against an omnipresent *threat*. He highlighted the importance of acting collaboratively to face the pandemic, asserting that "it's not the government that is solely responsible for your health. Each one of you is entrusted with his and others' health too" (March 25) and that "we and the citizens are all partners in combating this disease (March 2). On June 30, 2020, he further emphasized that "the stability of the epidemiological situation of the kingdom requires working shoulder-to-shoulder in fighting this disease."

Similarly, he highlighted collective sacrifice: "Our freedom was taken from us all by force" (March 21) and "we must all sacrifice for our society" (March 22). These arguments positioned compliance with defense laws as a civic and moral duty, justified by the looming threat of the virus and the necessity of shared action. Expressions like "team spirit," "holding together," and the characterization of Jordanians as "vigilant citizens" reinforced a discourse of collective awareness and duty, guiding citizens toward compliance as a form of shared responsibility.

4.4.4. Perspectivization Strategies

Jaber strengthened solidarity by shifting perspective and incorporating the voices of others. Reading aloud a message from a nurse on March 25 – "I work day and night to protect you. I haven't seen my children for days [...] Our roles may be different, but the purpose is one" – he foregrounded the nurse's voice and by extension the medical staff. By amplifying such perspectives and qualities of sacrifice and dedication (predication), Jaber reframed government directives as collective appeals endorsed by ordinary Jordanians, thereby invoking the topoi of responsibility (argumentation), encouraging citizens to act in recognition of these sacrifices.

4.4.5. Intensification/Mitigation Strategies

Finally, Jaber's tone oscillated with the epidemiological situation. When cases declined, he adopted a reassuring stance: "I have always used a comforting tone on this platform because I was confident that I could rely on each one

of you” (March 25). During spikes, his language became firmer and more authoritative, employing hedge-free assertions such as “The ministry’s course of action is clear” (July 26), and “the system is set and we are capable of dealing with the situation” (March 2). Modal verbs equivalent to “must” and “have to” shifted between obligation, necessity, and advice depending on urgency: “We *have to* abide by the law” (October 4) and “we *need* to make the best use of our time at home” (March 22).

Moreover, his code-switching between formal Modern Standard Arabic in case reporting and informal colloquial speech in appeals created intimacy and rapport, signaling group membership. He also tempered alarm with mitigations: “Our position is much better than others, but this is a serious indicator that we need to carefully think about”, and “No, we will not allow this to happen; we oughtn’t” (March 26). This balance of intensification and mitigation enabled him to sustain public vigilance without inducing panic.

4.5. The Semiotic Dimension

While discursive and linguistic strategies demonstrate how Jaber consolidated solidarity and projected a collective identity, his communicative impact cannot be fully understood without attending to the semiotic and paralinguistic dimensions of his performance. Voice quality, delivery style, and tonal modulation complemented the verbal strategies, shaping how the overall persuasive force of the briefings was achieved. Samovar et al. ^[58] remind us that collectivist societies attend closely to contextual cues, such as gestures, eye contact, and voice quality, when interpreting communication. Within Jordan’s collectivist culture, these semiotic elements played a central role in how Jaber’s messages were received.

4.5.1. Speech and Voice Quality

Jaber’s communicative style and prosodic features in the COVID-19 briefings illustrates how affordance and social semiotics intersect to shape public perception. His voice and delivery style conveyed calm authority and trustworthiness. His patterned, measured speech flow, his clear articulation and soft, steady tone nailed him an assimilation to a “story narrator,” on social media ^[51]. Rather than heightening alarm through urgent pitch or volume, he spoke

slowly and with composure. His clear and firm tone signaled authority and competence, while his calm demeanor and measured delivery conveyed reassurance and clarity. As one *Twitter* user put it, he was “very reassuring and encouraging as usual.” His gentle humor, humility, and openness softened the authority of his military persona, producing a multimodal profile that was both commanding and personable. This style kept the audiences alert without inducing fear and enabled them to absorb complex information at ease.

4.5.2. Public Perception

From a CDA perspective, Jaber’s paralinguistic features were not merely phonological habits but semiotic resources strategically mobilized. These semiotic resources recontextualized the multiple roles he embodied: the expert physician, the disciplined military figure, and the fatherly public servant – each carrying cultural resonance in the Jordanian context. His calm tone, measured pacing, softened volume, and hybrid register (mixing formal Arabic with colloquial articulation) were perceived by Jordanians as markers of association and trust. Alongside these, his consistently formal, starched attire visually reinforced discipline and professionalism. The multimodal orchestration of these prosodic and visual traits created the *sentient authority* style of Jaber, as they reinforced and legitimized government measures while cultivating emotional attachment, laying the ground for the extraordinary public reception his briefings generated.

The reception of Jaber’s discourse illustrates how performance and persona intersected to sustain public solidarity. As Ersan ^[7] observes, “in addition to his solid medical credentials, it is Jaber’s charming demeanour and warm eloquence that have endeared him to the public.” Psychology expert Ismat Hosu, quoted by Ersan, further emphasized that “Jordanians are not used to officials talking in a pleasant, fatherly way, with some degree of pleasant comedy, gentleness and simple humility.” His communicative style thus marked a break from the distant, bureaucratic tone typical of official discourse.

Public responses on social media underscored this difference. In the TV show *Before Deletion* ^[51], a citizen proposed awarding him a medal for his efforts. Another instance of appreciation emerged on May 7 on *Ro’ya TV*,

when a Jordanian named his newborn grandson “Saad Jaber” as a tribute to the minister’s “commitment, reassurance, and hard work” ^[59].

Social media amplified these expressions of affection. Jaber himself engaged with Jordanians online, responding calmly and directly to their questions and criticism. This move extended his discourse beyond institutional boundaries, and allowed citizens to experience his persona in a more intimate, interactive setting. As Sun ^[60] notes, public trust in crisis communication is significantly strength-

ened when credible individuals endorse official narratives. Jaber’s dual status as a medical expert and a public servant made him uniquely suited to play this role.

The symbolic capital he accumulated was vividly captured in artwork and media portrayals. He was depicted as “Superman” by young Jordanian artist Motaz Btoush (**Figure 4**), and often celebrated as the “Jordanian George Clooney.” ^[9] Such representations highlight how Jordanians perceived him not only as an authority figure but also as a cultural icon during a period of collective stress.



Figure 4. Artwork by Motaz Btoush portraying Jaber in a Superman outfit (Courtesy by *Middle East Eye*) ^[7].

This attachment persisted even after his tenure ended. When Jaber was succeeded by Natheer Obaidat on October 12, 2020, a viral video on *YouTube* ^[61] showed a child named Hashim crying on television and repeating “I want Saad Jaber.” The minister responded with a compassionate post, reinforcing the fatherly persona he had cultivated throughout the crisis. On the same day, Jaber thanked Jordanians via *Twitter* for their love and support, sealing his place in the collective memory of the pandemic.

5. Results

The Middle Ground Between Authority and Solidarity

Jaber consistently navigated the space between institutional authority and public solidarity, legitimizing restrictive measures while simultaneously humanizing his role. This interplay reflects Fairclough’s ^[40] claim that identities are constructed at the intersection of personal and institutional positions. Jaber’s legitimacy derived not only from his corporate role as Minister of Health and member of the crisis management team, but also from his identification

as part of the “bigger Jordanian family.” By extending his communication to social media and sharing videos of himself following safety protocols and greeting customs, Jaber infused his institutional persona with personal traits, standing in contrast to other officials who typically refrained from such direct engagement. In Fairclough’s terms, Jaber was not merely inhabiting a role but personifying it in ways that made authority and solidarity mutually reinforcing.

The government’s crisis communication, embodied in Jaber’s discourse, was thus not built on coercion or hostility but on appeals to shared responsibility and the “greater good.” What emerged was an intermediate position where authority was maintained through persuasion rather than force, a mode of governance that operated less by explicit dominance than by subtle alignment with public sentiment.

We describe this mode as *sentient authority* – a relational form of power that relies less on overt command and more on affective alignment cultivated between institutional figures and their audiences. It is enacted through softened voice, flexible modality, and calibrated social distance, eliciting legitimacy not through coercion but through empathy, attentiveness, and the reassurance of presence. In this sense,

sentient authority arises in the dialectical space where institutional authority is tempered by solidarity, allowing governance to be both directive and affectively resonant.

In the pandemic context, this middle ground was reinforced by Jaber's mobilizing statements that framed citizens as active partners in the fight against COVID-19. By invoking a *collective sense of responsibility*, he loosened the grip of top-down power, inviting voluntary adherence and shared ownership of the crisis response.

6. Conclusions

This study examined the press conference briefings delivered by Saad Jaber during the height of the COVID-19 crisis in Jordan, situating them within the frameworks of Critical Discourse Studies and social semiotics. Through van Leeuwen's legitimation model and Wodak's discursive strategies of identity construction, the analysis demonstrated how Jaber legitimized defense laws and public health measures while simultaneously fostering solidarity with the Jordanian public. His discourse blended inclusive pronouns, moral evaluation, and appeals to collective responsibility with perspectivization and intensification strategies that shifted dynamically in response to the epidemiological situation.

Beyond the linguistic realm, Jaber's paralinguistic performance – his calm tone, steady pacing, and measured prosody – played a crucial role in shaping the reception of his discourse. These semiotic resources afforded both authority and reassurance, reinforcing his public persona as a medical expert, disciplined military figure, and approachable fatherly presence. Public reception, as expressed on social media and in popular culture, further substantiated his status as a trusted figure whose influence extended well beyond institutional boundaries.

A key finding of this study is the emergence of what we have termed *sentient authority*: a relational mode of power enacted through empathy, attentiveness, and calibrated social distance. Unlike coercive authority, which relies on command and sanction, sentient authority gains legitimacy through affective resonance and the voluntary adherence it inspires. In Jaber's briefings, this mode of authority manifested in the blending of solidarity-building discourse with institutional legitimacy, creating a distinc-

tive middle ground between directive governance and collective identification.

By highlighting the interplay of linguistic, semiotic, and affective strategies, this study contributes to ongoing debates in Critical Discourse Analysis about how power and identity are negotiated in crisis communication. It shows that crisis briefings can function not only as vehicles of state authority but also as sites where authority is reshaped through solidarity and emotional resonance. For Jordan, Jaber's discourse constitutes a counter-crisis model that tempered the harshness of legal restrictions with empathy and reassurance, securing public cooperation in ways that strictly coercive strategies might not have achieved. This case study may act as an example for other scenarios where public speakers may implement a hybrid approach similar to the one used by Jaber in crisis and threat management.

Future research might explore how "sentient authority" operates across different cultural contexts and crises, as well as how such affective modes of governance shape long-term trust in public institutions. For CDA, this underscores the need to attend not only to textual and discursive structures but also to paralinguistic and semiotic dimensions that make authority livable, persuasive, and ultimately sustainable. Other methodological approaches may also be used for the analysis of data, such as generic analysis and inter-coder reliability methods.

Author Contributions

Both authors contributed to the methodological framing and conceptualization of the study. The second author collected the data for the study and analyzed the data in light of CDA, which was further developed by the first author. Both authors participated in the investigation of the discursive features of the briefings, writing of the manuscript, validation of information, and editing of the article. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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This study did not involve humans.

Data Availability Statement

The research data, which consisted of 32 briefings, were obtained from *YouTube*, *Facebook*, and other online resources. These links may be provided upon request.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest. The study was carried out on the sole premise of scientific investigation. The Minister of Health is perceived as a public figure in Jordan, with no prior acquaintance or personal affiliation with him. The results were strictly and scientifically obtained through the application of seminal theories in CDA.

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